



NSW & ACT

IPWEA

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Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety
(Staysafe)
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

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Dear Staysafe Committee,

Submission to Staysafe inquiry into interventions to reduce road trauma in regional NSW caused by speeding, fatigue, drink and drug driving

The Institute of Public Works and Engineering Australasia (NSW & ACT Division) fully supports the need for an increased focus on the disproportion of road trauma in regional areas.

To ensure a broad understanding of the issues relating to this inquiry, IPWEA (NSW & ACT) have engaged with a range of stakeholders in the road safety industry including RSO's, Council Executive staff and road safety experts in preparation of this submission. What is clear from our findings is that action is needed now more than ever, particularly for regional areas and that behavioural elements influencing road trauma are only one pillar of the Safe Systems principles, and further work is required to understand and increase the maturity of the remaining pillars in regional areas.

Please do not hesitate to contact William Douglas (via William.douglas@ipweansw.org) in relation to this submission.

Yours sincerely,

The Hon. David Elliott
Chief Executive Officer

Mr. Joshua Devitt
Chief Engineer

Interventions to reduce road trauma in regional NSW caused by speeding, fatigue, drink and drug driving

Road trauma in regional NSW continues to be a significant issue, with incidents in regional areas disproportionately higher than metropolitan areas. Over the past five years of published data (2019-2023) there has been no substantial reduction (or trend of a reduction) in behavioural elements influencing a serious injury or fatal crash in regional areas.

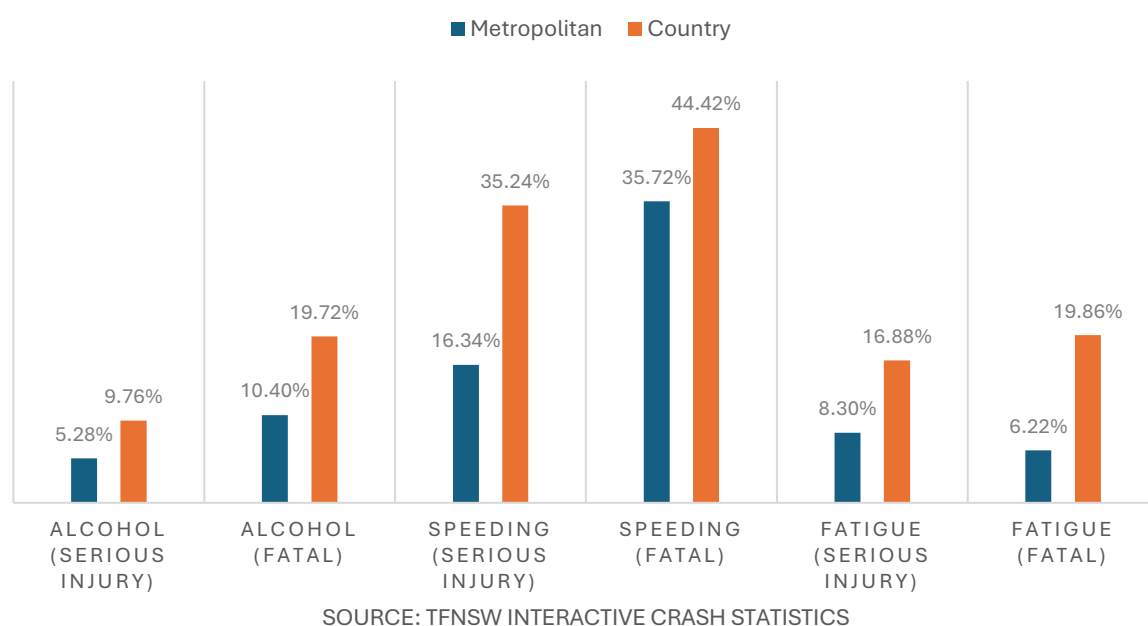


Figure 1 - Metropolitan and Country: Road users by behavioural factors in crashes (Average between 2019-2023)

Since the release of the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2026, the fatalities per 100,000 NSW residents have increased year on year. This trend highlights a critical reality: current efforts are not addressing the underlying causes of road trauma. Without urgent and effective change, particularly in regional areas – the goals set for 2030 and the Vision Zero target for 2050 will remain out of reach.

a) Research and data on regional NSW-specific factors, characteristics and demographics of road crashes

Transport for NSW (TfNSW) publishes a range of crash data sources, including dashboards, datasets, and interactive tools, which can support various road safety initiatives. While this state-wide aggregated data is useful for broad trend analysis, it does not always meet the needs of local councils – particularly those in regional areas who require more timely, specific, and actionable information to address community-level road safety concerns.

In preparing this submission, IPWEA (NSW & ACT) consulted with Road Safety Officers (RSOs) from regional councils. A consistent frustration raised was the delay in accessing crash data – typically up to two years after an incident has occurred. Councils also reported significant gaps in the level of detail provided, such as whether alcohol or drugs were involved. Without this context, councils struggle to identify the behavioural factors most affecting their communities, limiting their ability to implement targeted programs or strategies.

Further discussions with TfNSW revealed that while some behavioural data (on speeding and fatigue) may be accessible through the Safe System Analytics (SSA) Council App, RSOs find the platform difficult to navigate and extract information from. The *Review of the Local Government Road Safety Program* described the app as “cumbersome to use and not fit for purpose.” RSOs also noted that the associated RSO Portal/Hub is similarly challenging to operate, creating further barriers to timely and effective local analysis.

As a result, many councils are forced to base their interventions on outdated or incomplete data, undermining the potential impact of their efforts. To shift from a reactive to a proactive model, councils should be provided with fast, clear access to high-quality data, supported by fit-for-purpose tools and systems.

Further, the reliance on lag indicators results in losses being incurred by a community before road safety improvements are made, with improvements not always being made to the most dangerous sections of road (only those where accidents cluster). There is a wealth of information linking factors such as the road surface friction or the level of delineation of the road (as examples) to overall safety. Yet there is seemingly no focus on these lead or preventative type indicators in program design and/or delivery.

We know through several other inquiries, including the *inquiry into the ability of local governments to fund infrastructure and services*, that an alarming proportion of Council’s in NSW are financially unsustainable in that their total level of income is well below what is required to maintain their assets to current service levels. In regional and rural councils, roads can equate to 60-70 percent of the total asset base. This is leading

to a gradual decline in road surface condition and a proportionate reduction in road safety.

b) Effectiveness of current strategies and programs to reduce speeding, fatigue, drink and drug driving in regional NSW

Effective behaviour-change strategies in regional areas rely heavily on the leadership and participation of local councils. While the state has delivered various road safety campaigns and programs in recent years, these have typically followed a broad, one-size-fits-all approach. As a result, few have addressed the unique behavioural and cultural challenges present in regional communities – and none have achieved a measurable reduction in the disproportionately high rate of crashes linked to speeding, fatigue, and substance use in these areas.

Local councils are uniquely positioned to understand and influence their communities. They have the proximity, trust, and local knowledge needed to shape initiatives that will deliver maximum benefit to local communities. This community-level connection represents a powerful, underutilised lever in efforts to change driver behaviour and reduce road trauma in regional NSW.

Despite the state's public commitment to achieving Vision Zero by 2050, it is important to recognise that councils are responsible for managing the majority of the NSW road network. Without their active engagement, the Vision Zero target is simply unattainable. Since road safety is not a specifically defined function of local government, most Councils do not have internal systems or processes to support initiatives for either behavioural or infrastructure solutions. Beyond that, regional councils specifically, have significant barriers limiting their ability to address their community's road safety issues including a lack of resources, capability, and/or organisational support to act. More work must be done to educate local government on their duties in road safety as well as providing them with suitable systems and support mechanisms from the state and federal governments to empower them to make effective change.

Many regional councils that participate in the Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP) report significant limitations with the program. These shared concerns contribute to a broader perception across the local government sector that the program is ineffective – ultimately discouraging further council participation. As identified in the *Review of the LGRSP*, the project application and approval process is slow, inconsistent, and unnecessarily complex. This inefficiency delays the delivery of important local road safety interventions. While oversight is necessary, the current approach actively impedes progress. Councils need a streamlined, consistent, and supportive framework that enables them to respond quickly and effectively to the challenges their communities face.

c) Proposed measures to reduce road trauma in regional NSW

The single greatest barrier to reducing road trauma in regional NSW is the lack of alignment between state and local governments. While there is broad agreement on the importance of road safety; the systems, responsibilities, and processes currently in place often operate in conflict with one another. This misalignment delays action, limits local autonomy, and weakens the overall effectiveness of public sector responses.

At the local government level, many regional councils are unsure of their role in road safety. This is further compounded by the lack of any legislative requirement to consider road safety by NSW councils, something that is being looked at as a part of the ongoing review of the *NSW Roads Act*. For those councils that do recognise their responsibility, the challenge often lies in a lack of resources, both financial and time – as well as limited access to relevant data, guidance, and technical skills. These limitations make it difficult for councils to identify risk factors, develop interventions, and implement effective solutions.

d) Implementation of relevant recommendations from the 2023 Regional Road Safety Audit Report of the Auditor-General, entitled ‘Regional Road Safety’, dated 30 November 2023

IPWEA (NSW & ACT) welcomed the recommendations from the 2023 *Regional Road Safety Audit* as critical reforms needed to reduce preventable deaths and improve outcomes for regional road users. However, achieving the state’s 2030 and 2050 road safety targets will require far stronger and more direct collaboration with local government than currently exists.

In the 20 months since the audit’s release, there has been little to no substantial progress in implementing its recommendations. IPWEA (NSW & ACT), in preparing this submission, was unable to identify any publicly documented or operational work addressing Recommendations 1 and 2. Regarding Recommendation 3, which called for a review of the Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP), some progress has been made. A consultation paper was released in October 2024, identifying structural issues within the program, including slow approval processes, inadequate communication channels, and barriers to effective collaboration between state and local governments. However, none of the paper’s findings or recommendations have been acted upon to date.

This inaction is tragically reflected in the road trauma data. As of the date of submission, there have been 210 fatalities on NSW roads in the calendar year of 2025. Of that 210, 136 (64.8 percent) were in country regions, which is 24 percent greater than

in the same period of 2024. To achieve the 2030 milestones, in 2024 there should have been no more than 263 fatalities – there were 340.

Put simply; without meaningful change, these numbers will continue to climb. The slow pace of reform on safety systems, funding mechanisms, and governance structures is directly undermining the state's own targets. The urgency for action has never been greater.

e) Any other related matters.

The higher proportion of serious injury and fatal crashes in regional NSW involving alcohol, fatigue, or speeding does not necessarily indicate that these behaviours are more common than in metropolitan areas. Rather, it highlights a systemic vulnerability: the reduced presence and performance of other Safe System pillars in regional areas; safer roads, safer vehicles, and safer speeds.

In regional areas, road environments are often less forgiving, vehicles may be older or less equipped with safety features, enforcement is a logistical challenge, speed management is less consistent and not aligned with Safe System principles, and the average speed of crashes is much greater than that of metropolitan areas. As a result, when high-risk behaviours do occur, the likelihood of death or serious injury is significantly higher than in metropolitan areas.

To better understand and address this imbalance, IPWEA (NSW & ACT) recommends that Transport for NSW undertake a dedicated study into the disparities in Safe System implementation between metropolitan and regional NSW. This work would provide essential insights into the compounding risks faced by regional communities and inform more targeted, system-level responses.

In addition, IPWEA (NSW & ACT) recommends that the process of setting and managing of speed limits is streamlined, with greater influence by local government – particularly in urbanised local roads and town centres – where local context and community needs can be better accounted for. This would enable councils to implement speed strategies that are more responsive, flexible, and aligned with Vision Zero principles.

Lastly, IPWEA (NSW & ACT) supports the increased roll out of innovative solutions in regional areas which can help address some of the resourcing challenges being experienced. An example of this are AI technology solutions, such as the Asset AI platform being developed by IPWEA (NSW & ACT) and Transport for NSW, which passively collects data on the condition of the road network and helps councils proactively identify areas of high risk.

To enable meaningful change, IPWEA (NSW & ACT) proposes the following measures:

Short-term priorities:

1. **Implement the recommendations** of the 2023 *Regional Road Safety* audit and the 2024 review of the Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP).
2. **Clarify the role of local government** in delivering Vision Zero, through guidance and/or policy frameworks that recognise councils as central actors in the road safety system.
3. **Improve access to timely, localised crash data**, including behavioural indicators, so that councils can better understand risks in their communities.
4. **Streamline funding and support mechanisms** to allow councils to act swiftly and strategically.
5. **Undertake a dedicated assessment of Safe System disparities between metropolitan and regional NSW**, with a focus on the maturity and effectiveness of the safer roads, safer vehicles, and safer speeds pillars.
6. **Closely consult with councils in determining the appropriate speed limits in their respective Local Government Areas (LGAs)**, and streamline the process of changes to speed limits.
7. **Support and expand the deployment of innovative technologies** – such as AI-driven platforms like Asset AI, to assist regional councils in overcoming resourcing challenges. These solutions enable the passive collection of road condition data and support proactive identification of high-risk locations, improving councils' ability to maximise their limited resources.

Longer-term reforms:

- Incentivise or require all NSW councils to develop **Road Safety Strategies**, supported by:
 - Road Safety Action Plans
 - Network Safety Plans
 - Data-informed performance targets
 - Dedicated officer roles (i.e. RSOs)

These measures would empower councils to take proactive, place-based action and strengthen the collective ability of NSW to reduce serious injuries and fatalities on regional roads.